## Common Literary Terms

1. **Character development (characterization).** An author may reveal a character through the character’s thoughts, words, appearance, and actions, or through what other characters say or think. An author may also tell us directly what the character is like. Examining the characters and how they interact with each other is a key element to understanding the piece of literature.

Here are some common questions about characterization:

* + Who is the main character? What words describe this character’s personality traits?
  + Who are the minor characters? What roles do they play?
  + How is one character similar to or different from another?
  + How is the main character involved in the conflict?

1. **Setting.** The setting is when and where a story takes place. You may be asked to determine why the setting is important or how the setting affects the interpretation. The setting can clarify conflict, be the catalyst for conflict, illuminate character, affect the mood (see literary term #9), and act as a symbol.
2. **Plot.** Literature commonly follows a specific pattern or plot structure. It often begins with **exposition** that may introduce the characters, establish the setting, and reveal the problem or conflict. The tension may build through a series of **complications** (incidents that either help or hinder the protagonist in finding a solution). This is the **rising action**. The **climax** is the peak or turning point of the action, when the problem is resolved. At this point the reader usually knows the outcome. The **denouement** or

**The Importance of Time**

Sometimes authors use foreshadowing and flashback to help tell a story.

These techniques involve altering the timeframe from which a story is related. With **foreshadowing**, the author gives hints of what is to come in the future. With **flashback**, the storyline shifts to the past to give readers important information to help them understand the story better.

**falling action** is the part after the climax. It gives any necessary explanation and ends with **resolution**, the sense that the story is complete.

***STRATEGY BOX––Map It Out***

Using a plot map can help you better understand a story’s development.

**Climax**

**Falling Action**

**Rising**

**Exposition**

**-Characters**

**-Setting**

**-Conflict**

**Action**

**Event 2**

**Resolution**

**Event 1**

1. **Irony.** Irony is a form of speech intended to convey the opposite of the actual meaning of the words. There are several different types of irony, including dramatic, situational, and verbal. You are probably most familiar with **verbal irony**, or sarcasm. The speaker’s intended central idea is far different from the usual meaning of the words. For example, a teenager may tell his mother, “I just *love* cleaning up my room,” when, in fact, the teenager means that he hates to clean his room. (Please see pages 36–37 for more information on verbal irony and figurative language.)

Another example of irony that may not be as familiar is **irony of fate**, also called **situational irony**. Irony of fate refers to developments that are far from what is expected or believed to be deserved. One example of irony of fate would be famed composer Ludwig von Beethoven’s loss of hearing.

1. **Imagery.** Imagery, or language that appeals to the senses, allows the reader to experience what the author is describing. You’ve heard the saying “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Authors use imagery to convey a mental picture for the reader— more than they could accomplish with literal words.
2. **Symbolism.** Symbolism is another way in which writers use language to express something more than the literal meaning of the words. A symbol is something that stands for something else. For example, an eagle may symbolize freedom.
3. **Conflict.** Most plots have a conflict. The conflict is what triggers the action in the story. Here are some common conflicts in literature:
   * person vs. person
   * person vs. nature
   * person vs. self
   * person vs. society
   * person vs. machine
4. **Point of view.** The point of view is the perspective from which a story is told. The point of view refers to the narrator of a story, poem, or sometimes a drama, and determines how much he or she knows.

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| *First Person* | The events are told by a character in the story using his or her own words. First-person stories have narrators who use *I*, *me*, and *my* throughout the story. This sentence is an example of first-person point of view: “I knew it was risky, but I was willing to take that chance.” |
| *Second Person* | The narrator addresses the reader directly using the word *you*. This perspective is not as common as either the first- or third-person points of view. This sentence is an example of second-person point of view: “You knew it was risky, but you were willing to take that chance.” |
| *Third Person* | A speaker outside the action narrates the events using *he*, *she*, and *they*. The narrator may tell the events from the perspective of one character, focusing on this character’s thoughts and feelings, or the narrator may see and know everything, even the thoughts of all the characters. This sentence is an example of third-person point of view: “Carol knew it was risky, but she was willing to take the chance.” |

1. **Mood.** Mood in a piece of literature is a feeling or emotion created by the choice of words, the characters and their actions, and the setting. Some authors create mood by using imagery. The example below shows how the mood of a story can change by making a few alterations:

Imagine a group of people in an old, three-story house. The people are whispering and walking very slowly through the house. They are easily startled. Some are visibly shaking. The mood created here is one of scary suspense. A reader will wonder what has scared the people and may feel some suspense about the events to come.

Now, change the mood by imagining the people talking loudly. They are gesturing at various rooms in the house and whistling appreciatively. They seem excited about the old, colored-glass windows. A reader could assume that these people are about to move into the old house. The mood is no longer scary and suspenseful. It is now light and optimistic.

1. **Tone.** The tone of a piece of literature is the attitude the **author** has toward the subject he or she is writing about. Tone is reflected in the author’s word choices, style, and opinions. Some words used to describe tone in literature are ironic, serious, puzzled, intimate, outraged, and cynical.

Mood is sometimes confused with tone. Mood is created by setting and the actions of the characters; it is the atmosphere. Mood affects how the **reader** feels in reading the story; tone reflects the author’s feelings toward the subject of the story. Tone is examined in several sections of this study guide.

1. **Theme.** The theme is the deeper central idea of a text. It refers to a universal statement about life and/or society that can be discerned from the reading of a text. The theme of a work is not the same as its main topic, which focuses strictly on the content. The theme of a literary work is often the meaning you take away from it. Theme is covered in more detail on pages 28–31.

**NOTE**: Most of these literary terms are used when discussing works of fiction, but may also apply to literary nonfiction, other texts, as well as presentations.

Questions related to fictional texts may look like these:

#### Which sentence from the story foreshadows the climax?

* + **What causes the narrator to struggle with his decision?**
  + **How does the setting affect the pace of the story?**

**DRAMA**

This part of the standard focuses on drama, or dramatic literature. You will need to understand and analyze types of dramatic literature. The two most common types are tragedies and comedies. A **tragedy** is a serious play that ends in disaster and sorrow. A **comedy** is a lighthearted play intended to amuse the audience. Comedies usually end happily.

As with other literary genres in this standard, you will need to analyze the characters, structures, and themes of dramatic literature. In order to answer these questions, use what you know about these elements in other genres to answer the questions related to dramatic literature. You also need to review terms that are more specific to drama.

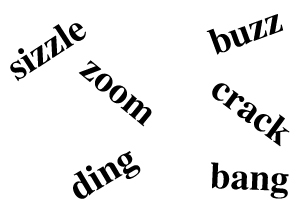
**Dramatic conventions** are rules in which the actors and audience engage during a play. Some conventions relate to how the audience and the actors interact. For example, the audience knows to become quiet when the lights dim. **Dramatic irony** refers to a situation in which the audience knows more than the character onstage. A character does or says something of greater importance than he or she knows. The audience, however, is aware of the meaning and importance of the act or speech.

The final part of this standard asks you to analyze how dramatic conventions support and enhance interpretation of dramatic literature. To answer questions in this section, you will need to apply what you have learned about dramatic conventions.

#### POETRY

For the poetry part of this standard, you need to identify and respond to the subject matter, language, and sound devices in a variety of poems. While some of these devices may appear in other fiction and nonfiction, they help to make poetry a distinctive genre.

To answer questions in this standard, you need to identify the topic of the poem (what it’s about) and its theme (what statement it makes about life or society). Then you’ll need to identify how the poet creates the topic and the theme. How the poet reveals the topic and the theme through the use of imagery, word choice, and structure.



**Onomatopoeia** is a sound device where a word imitates the sounds associated with it.

As you read a poem, you may “hear” the writing in your mind. Sound devices make poetry sound better in your mind. These sound devices include the following:

* + **Alliteration**. Alliteration is the repetition of one initial sound in more than one

word. Usually, the repeated sound is of a consonant. “Wild and woolly” and “hale and hearty” are examples.

* + **Rhyme scheme.** The rhyme scheme is the pattern of rhymes in a poem. Each new rhyme in a stanza is represented by a different letter of the alphabet. For example, in a four-line poem in which every other line rhymes, the rhyme scheme is abab. In a six-line poem with every two lines rhyming, the rhyme scheme is aabbcc.

Be sure to study **ALL** sound device terms you have learned in your English class.

While sound devices are important in poetry, the structure of a poem is often its most distinctive characteristic. Poems are written in stanzas, or groups of lines. These stanzas are arranged in either fixed form or free form. **Fixed form** is what most people consider typical poetry: it’s written in traditional verse and generally rhymes. Some fixed form poems have specific requirements on length, rhyme scheme, and number of syllables. A sonnet, for example, is a 14-line rhymed poem. **Free form**, or free verse, poetry follows no specific guidelines about rhyme, meter, or length. Free form often tries to capture the cadence of regular speech. Some stanzas may rhyme but not in a regular scheme.

Some poems are **narrative** poems. The main purpose of a narrative poem is to tell a story. **Lyric** poetry expresses a person’s thoughts or feelings. Elegies, odes, and sonnets are types of lyric poems.

Questions related to poetry may look like the following:

#### Which element of the poem MOST reflects the speaker’s joy?

* + **How does the mood shift from the first stanza to the second stanza?**
  + **How would the speaker in Poem 2 most likely answer the question posed in Poem 1?**

**NONFICTION**

The questions for this standard may address the development of ideas and events of any type of nonfictional material. There are a number of types of nonfiction and informational passages you may encounter on the EXAM. The types of texts you will read come from three common kinds of writing, each with its own purpose and conventions:

* + **Informational Text** is writing that explains or informs. Informational texts include business letters and memos; how-to passages that explain a process or project; news stories; and historical, scientific, and technical accounts (including digital sources) written for a broad audience. These texts use expository and descriptive writing to explain and describe the topic in order to inform the reader.
  + **Argumentation**, or argumentative writing, is also known as persuasive writing. Argumentation is based on logic and reason and has the intent of informing as well as persuading. The sole purpose of persuasive writing is to convince people to think or act in a certain way. Most advertising is considered persuasive. Argumentation may include editorials and opinion pieces; speeches; letters to the editor; job application letters; and critical reviews, such as movie and book reviews. (Advertising will be covered separately in Domain II).
  + **Literary Nonfiction** is narrative writing that tells a story and often employs the literary devices found in stories and novels. Literary nonfiction includes anecdote; memoir (first-person account of a time in the writer’s life, e.g., a person’s travels), biography (third-person account of someone’s life), or autobiography (first-person account of a person’s entire life to the present); or other retelling of true events.

**NOTE:** Most passages contain some combination of the common kinds of writing but will generally fit best in one category or the other.

Questions related to nonfiction texts may look like these:

#### Why does the author MOST likely organize the essay from present to past?

* + **How does the description of the concert crowd support the argument for assigned seating?**

Authors employ a variety of techniques to convey meaning, engage readers, and express familiar ideas in new ways. Some may use **figurative language**, or figures of speech, to convey meaning that goes beyond the literal meaning of the words.

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| **Literal Language: The words mean exactly what they say.** | **Figurative Language: The words are comparisons to different, often unexpected, ideas.** |
| * I have a *headache*. * Please *watch* my suitcase. * He went to *eat lunch*. | * My head is *killing me*. * Please *keep an eye on* my suitcase. * He went to *grab a bite*. |

Whenever you describe an object or an idea by comparing it with something else, you are using figurative language. The two figures of speech with which you are probably most familiar are similes and metaphors. Both are comparisons. A **simile** makes a comparison using a linking word such as *like*, *as*, or *than*. If a graduation speaker describes her first job as being “about as exciting as watching grass grow,” she is using a simile; she compares the pace of her job with the pace of grass growing. A **metaphor** makes a comparison without a linking word; instead of one thing being *like* another, one thing *is* another. If that same graduation speaker warns students about the stress of the business world by saying, “It’s a jungle out there,” she is using a metaphor; she emphasizes her point by equating the wild chaos of the business world with an actual jungle.

Other examples of figurative language to recognize are **personification** (giving human characteristics to non-human things), **hyperbole** (exaggeration beyond belief), and **idioms** (quirky sayings and expressions specific to a language). The chart on the next page summarizes the types of figurative language that you should be able to identify and interpret.

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| **Term** | **Definition** | **Example** |
| Simile | A direct comparison between two unlike things, often connected  by *like*, *as*, or *than* | Life is like a box of chocolates. |
| Metaphor | An implied comparison between two unrelated things | My summer plans had become a box of chocolates melting in the sun. |
| Personification | A figure of speech giving human characteristics to  an animal, thing, idea, or other inanimate object | The box of chocolates called to me from the kitchen. |
| Hyperbole | An extravagant or excessive exaggeration | It will take me ten years to eat that huge box of chocolates. |
| Idiom | A saying or expression  specific to speakers of a particular language | That gadget is about as  useful as a chocolate teapot. |

Another technique authors use to present precise ideas and set a certain tone is to choose words based on their connotations. The dictionary definition of a word is its **denotation**. The **connotation** of a word is a specific meaning or idea that the word brings to mind.

For example, both *laugh* and *giggle* have a similar denotation. These words refer to sounds you make when you find something funny. However, the word *giggle* has youthful connotations associated with it. You often think of children giggling, but rarely think of grandfathers giggling. The word *laugh* has no such connotations associated with it. Therefore, while the denotation of both words is the same, the connotations are different. If a writer decides to describe a grandfather giggling, she probably means to hint that he has a youthful spirit or is feeling particularly young at heart.

Once you are familiar with figurative and connotative uses of language, you will need to analyze how those uses impact the meaning and tone of a passage. Every writer makes choices when it comes to which word(s) to use in a given situation. Those word choices can lead readers to imagine a particular time or place. Word choice can set a formal or informal tone, depending on whether the author wants to persuade, entertain, or impress readers.

After you read the passage, ask yourself these questions:

* + What is this passage about?
  + What are its central ideas and themes?
  + In what order do events occur in the passage? What happens first?
  + Does imagery or symbolism suggest ideas and connections?
  + How does the author use language to achieve a desired effect?
  + Are there any words I don’t know? Can I look at the language around unfamiliar words for context clues that suggest their meaning? Can I use the words’ structures to determine meaning? How does the dictionary define the words?
  + (For fiction) What important events make up the plot? What is the conflict in the passage? Who are the characters and what are their personality traits? How do the characters change, develop, and interact with each other over the course of the story? How does the setting affect the plot or theme of the story? Who is the narrator of the passage? Is the narrator a character in the passage? What is the effect of the point of view on the reader’s understanding of the story?
  + (For drama) What type of dramatic literature is the passage? Who are the characters? What does their dialogue and actions reveal about their beliefs and motivations? What are the play’s themes? What types of dramatic conventions (such as lighting, scenery, dramatic irony, etc.) does the playwright use? How does the use of these conventions affect the reader or viewer of the play?
  + (For poetry) What is this poem about? Who is the speaker? What specific details help readers understand the meaning of the poem? What types of sound devices does the poet use? How is the poem structured? How does the poem’s structure effect or contribute to its theme?
  + (For nonfiction) What is the purpose of this work? How is the passage structured? What details in the passage support the author’s points or provide evidence of the author’s ideas? How does the author use language to convey a central idea?

**OUTLINE**

**Title**: Options for Research

**Thesis**: There are many different resources you can use when researching a topic.

1. The library has more than books
   1. Magazines
   2. Reference materials
   3. AV materials
   4. Internet access
2. What’s on the Web
   1. Academic sites
   2. News sites
   3. Company sites
   4. Personal sites
3. Interview the experts
   1. Scholars in the field
   2. Professionals

**Concluding statement**: When researching a topic, take advantage of the many resources available.

Authors of informational or technical texts often use a traditional outline to plan their writing. They may first state the central idea they want to get across and then address all the supporting ideas, leaving the reader with an impression, a prediction, or a pondering thought about the central idea. See the example outline in the box.

From this outline, it is clear that the central idea is “writers should take advantage of the different resources available to them.” The central idea for this paper will most likely be in the thesis sentence of the introductory paragraph. Each paragraph will support the central idea by identifying a category of resources (e.g., the Internet) and then giving specific information about it.

The **central idea** can often be found in one or more of these places:

* + The title
  + The thesis statement
  + The conclusion

The **subordinate**, or supporting, ideas of a passage can often be found in one or both of these places:

* + The topic sentence of each paragraph
  + The body paragraphs

In a well-written passage, you should find evidence to support main and subordinate ideas. This evidence may include

* + Anecdotes
  + Descriptions
  + Facts
  + Statistics
  + Expert Statements

**The Secrets of Organization**

A gifted writer knows that there are many ways to organize and develop information. Different topics require different strategies. Some of the more common ways to organize a passage include the following:

* Chronological order
* Cause and effect
* Comparison and contrast
* Asking and answering questions

A writer’s choice depends on the point he or she wants to make. An informational report, for example, may start with “How can you conserve energy?” and then be followed by the answer in a series of well-supported paragraphs.

To test your knowledge of Standard English, you will be asked to identify and correct the grammatical errors in a sentence or part of a passage. The list below identifies some of the topics you may see on the EXAM.

* + Subject-verb agreement
  + Sentence structure (inappropriate fragments and run-ons)
  + Verbs (correct tense, shifts in verb tense, inappropriate shifts in verb voice and mood,

and use of irregular verbs)

* + Precise word choice
  + Homonyms
  + Double-negatives/comparisons
  + Pronouns and pronoun-antecedent agreement(including inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person and vague pronouns; i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents)
  + Commonly confused words/misused words
  + Placement of modifiers (phrases and clauses within a sentence, recognizing and correcting misplaced and dangling modifiers)
  + Parallel structure
  + Use of phrases and clauses to convey meaning and add variety and interest to writing or presentations
* Verbals – gerunds, participles, infinitives